The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

No. 35 JUNE 26th, 1940

DEAR MEMBER,

The battle of France has been lost. The British Empire has decided to carry on the fight. When a big decision has been taken there comes a sense of relief. We have made our choice; the path is clear; our hearts are at rest; the issue is in the hands of God.

What does the continued existence of the British Empire mean for the world?

In the security of our island home our people have created a society animated by a love of freedom and justice, acknowledging the rights of the common man and cherishing the qualities of toleration, mercy and humanity. The tradition they established has been transplanted to other continents and has exerted an influence over a large part of the earth. If Germany were to win the war, the institutions in which these values have found embodiment would perish from the earth. America alone could not preserve them.

But it is vital at the moment when all this is at stake that we should face not only our achievement but our failure. We have not risen to the height of our historic mission. We have been half-hearted in extending the principles of justice and freedom from the political to the social and economic sphere. We have tolerated many injustices. We have allowed ourselves to be seduced by the temptations of wealth and power; indeed, as the Supplement this week suggests, we led the world in the race for these. We no longer have the sense of mission we once had. In a bewildering situation forces are at work which threaten our heritage but which we are not sure we know how to master.

There were high hopes in the last war that it would be the means of national regeneration. They were disappointed; we slipped back into the old ways. Once again we have our chance. The disaster of the war may turn to our salvation, if it reawakens in us a living faith in the potential destiny of our people; if it stabs us awake and opens our eyes to the things that really matter. That change has in part begun. We are beginning to see that in this crisis personal possessions do not count; it is the fundamental human qualities of integrity, dedication, responsibility, initiative and creative craftsmanship that are the vital social values. But there will be no radical change of mind that will have lasting effect unless the peoples of the Empire experience a religious rebirth.

MAGNA CARTA

Mr. Amery's broadcast talk on the eve of the French surrender was not only admirable in substance but the best propaganda that we have yet had. If this note had been struck repeatedly with the same firm conviction from the beginning of the war the rally to the allied cause would have been prompter, more united and more decisive. Doubt about what this country is fighting for would have been more quickly dispelled.

The speech was the utterance of a living faith, expressing itself in a consistent

political philosophy and a determination to translate the faith and philosophy into action. Speaking on the anniversary of the signing of Magna Carta, Mr. Amery described the freedom there achieved as a "freedom which comes from the enforcement of the law on all without regard to privilege or power." He went on to show how this liberty which is "a meaningless thing except as a right adjustment between all the forces and elements in the national life" had found embodiment in the growth of the British Commonwealth of Nations.

What gave special significance to the speech, however, was the clear assertion of faith in the applicability of the principle to India and of the intention to apply it. It is for this evidence of deeds proving the sincerity of proclaimed beliefs that the world has been waiting. Mr. Amery has made it clear, as Secretary of State for India, speaking no doubt with the authority of the Cabinet, that the only way to fight Nazi domination is to commit ourselves with a new dedication and passion to the principle of freedom. He did this with a thoroughly realistic appreciation of the difficulties to be overcome. His words are those of a true statesman. They deserve to be reproduced in full:

"In the case of India we have made manifest our sincere desire that she should, as a willing partner, attain to the same status in the British Commonwealth as is enjoyed by the Dominions, or, for that matter, by ourselves. If there are obstacles, apart from the immediate urgencies of war, to the speedy fulfilment of that desire, they arise more from the inherent complexities in India's own internal religious, social and historic structure, than from any reluctance on our part to hasten the transition from one control to the other. It is our genuine wish to help to bridge over existing differences, and to enable Indians as soon as possible to play the vital part which they are entitled to play in devising the permanent framework of India's future constitution.

"The task before the leaders of India, as before ourselves, is one of the noblest, if also one of the most difficult, which statesmanship has ever essayed. It will need all the spirit of Magna Carta, its practical sense as well as its generosity, to make that task possible of achievement."

It is clear to Mr. Amery that the only alternative to the worship "of the new gods of arbitrary power, of racial arrogance and of mechanised thought" is to renew our faith in the principle of freedom.

If there is in our hearts an unalterable resolve to apply the principles of freedom and justice alike in the political and in the social and economic sphere, and to dedicate ourselves to the creative tasks that are necessary to make these principles effective in a modern planned society, we can face our present ordeal with confidence.

The most sinister weapon which Hitler has employed has been the Fifth Column. He has known how to trade for his own ends on the weaknesses and vices of men. We have not yet found the answer to the Fifth Column; yet it lies ready to our hand. Let us appeal by the sincerity of our purpose as shown in our acts not to what is worst in men but to the latent love of justice and freedom in the hearts of the common people everywhere. The slumbering moral energies of the spirit of man will thus be awakened and a force set in motion which no tyranny can withstand.

THE UNSEEN WORLD

But all this is possible only if there is a *religious* renewal. It is not from man himself that these reawakened energies can come. His claim to freedom rests in the last resort on his relation to God.

Hitler has won triumph upon triumph. He has fastened his hold on the German

people. He has crushed in turn Czecho-Slovakia, Poland, Norway, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, and last of all, France. Yet with it all he remains but mortal man. All the wisdom of the world assures us of the transiency of his achievement. Of those who measure themselves against God it is the lesson of all history that "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision."

Early or late
They stoop to fate.

Shakespeare set in a true light the scene we are now witnessing:

Man, proud man,
Drest in a little brief authority,
Most ignorant of what he's most assured,
His glassy essence, like an angry ape,
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven
As make the angels weep.

"Men think" wrote Newman "that they are lords of the world, and may do as they will. They think this earth their property, and its movements in their power; whereas it has other lords beside them, and is the scene of a higher conflict than they are capable of conceiving."

It is on that higher conflict that we must fix our minds. Unless victory is won there also the results of victory on the field of battle will be only dead sea fruit. It is true that if Germany wins the war the institutions which safeguard liberty will perish from the earth. It does not follow that if Germany is defeated they will be preserved. They will have to be created afresh in the teeth of unprecedented difficulties.

In this ultimate conflict, waged in the unseen as well as the visible world, we are assured of two things. First, that every act of trust in God, every response to truth and goodness, every yielding of ourselves to the power of love, every deed of compassion and kindness is contributing to the final victory and has its place in the eternal order. And, secondly, that it is in the power of God to *renew* the life of the world and, when the power of evil is at its height, to bring into existence contrary, life-giving, regenerating forces to fight against it and ultimately vanquish it.

THE TREATMENT OF ALIENS

I have had several letters about the problem of refugees since I wrote about it a fortnight ago. There is evidence of a growing popular hostility to aliens, even among those who up till now have been friendly. Moreover, new hardship and distress have been caused to many refugees by the declaration of additional areas as protected areas which aliens must leave at once. They are thus compelled to move to new districts where they are strangers and in many cases destitute.

It is necessary to guard against the dangers which the unscrupulousness of Nazi methods has created. But whatever precautions it may be necessary for the Government to take, it would be disastrous for us as private citizens and Christians to forget that there is on the other side a danger no less real. It is that under the influence of panic we may let go the qualities of trust in our fellow-men, sympathy and human kindness which are essential to the making of a better world. The world's stock of these qualities is already too far reduced to suffer any further diminution.

I appeal to you to do what you can to restrain and educate public opinion. People must be helped to understand the circumstances under which these refugees have come to our shores as victims of Nazi tyranny, and to realise that their personal history and conduct have been so exhaustively scrutinised by the authorities that aliens who are left at liberty may be regarded as above suspicion.

THE SUPPLEMENT

The challenging Supplement this week is by Mr. Philip Mairet, the editor of the *New English Weekly*. The issues which it raises claim our attention even when the enemy is at our gates, since they have to do with the objects for which the war is being fought. The paper attributes the present plight of Western civilisation to two fundamental causes. In the first place, the opening up of the world, scientific discoveries and technical invention led to a fabulous production of goods, the character of which was determined not by any conscious scale of values, but by the ability to sell them at a profit. Secondly, nature was regarded not as God's creation, on which man was dependent and which he must understand and reverence, but as mere material to be used in any way that seemed to be to his advantage. The consequence has been the reckless exploitation of the resources of the earth, which is now becoming a grave menace.

The paper raises a religious issue of cardinal importance in regard to the relation of man to nature. The access to new sources of wealth and the dazzling conquests of nature gave rise to a conception of man as a self-sufficient individual, lord of creation, shaper of his own destiny and the determiner of all values. No view of man could be more false. Individual man is dependent from first to last on nature, his fellows and God, and he finds the end and meaning of his existence in a right relation to all three. On the recovery of an understanding of this truth the future of civilisation depends. Mr. Mairet may be right in thinking that a crucial stage in such a religious conversion is a new appreciation of man's dependence on nature.

The question of the extent to which the resources of the earth are approaching the point of exhaustion is one of fact, but obviously no issue is more crucial for the continued existence of man on this planet.

The practical consequences of the right religious attitude to nature in the social and economic spheres are not discussed in the paper. The writer's object is to make us face the question rather than to provide the answer. This will have to be supplied by many minds, courageous enough to recognise the importance of the issue and to deal with it in a spirit of humility and dedication.

OUR MEMBERSHIP

It is rather striking that last week—a week of international crisis and exceptional anxiety and strain—our membership was increased by no less than a hundred. It shows that there is a growing number of people who want, particularly at this time, to be associated with others in a common effort to understand the situation and what it demands from us. This week we learn that one of our groups has enlarged its membership from six to fifty—another sign that things are moving.

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

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THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER

The Supplement
No. 35

JUNE 26th, 1940

MAN, NATURE AND WAR

Dear Dr. Oldham,

It might seem needless now, to raise the question whether our country is sufficiently conscious of the issue that underlies this war: for all the deliberation and procrastination of the months of "slow war" are swallowed up in a scene of tumultuous energies and mortal struggles. By "the issue," however, one does not mean what men immediately fight for. Nor does one mean the problems, political and strategic, which the Press has kept chiefly before our minds.

When I urge that we spare a moment to deepen our consciousness of the issue, I am not forgetting the spontaneous response to human emergency so magnificently demonstrated by our people as it was on the Flanders coast, and is in many a disaster at home or at sea. Nor am I thinking only of the ethical and political challenge of Germany's assault upon the West. I am thinking of the economic, social and cultural *illness*—for so we have felt it—which afflicted all Western society for years before it culminated in this terrible convulsion. For there is a partly visible, not wholly unknown cause of this modern sickness of civilisation that is *general*. It has been made much worse by the reactions of particular nations and national movements, but it is common to them all, and its cure is a common problem for humanity. Historians will say it was the real issue before mankind in our generation.

This is sometimes called the economic issue—a most inadequate term, for it is much more than that. We heard more about it during the dark months of "slow war" from people who were more or less disaffected to the national cause, including many pacifists. Their statements of this issue, which were varied, generally amounted to this: that Germany and the other "totalitarian" states are openly in revolt against the nineteenth century system of world-economics, whereas we are still trying to make that system work. We are defending that old order of things, although our faith in it has long been waning, and many of our best spirits have spent themselves in efforts to reform it. The idea that an Allied victory would fasten this system finally upon all nations is given colour by the fact that some responsible speakers on both sides—and in America—have given just this meaning to the struggle.

Before I try to examine what truth there is in this view, let me say that it ought not to weaken a citizen in his resolution to defend his country. To demand perfection in the causes for which one assumes responsibility may be a dangerous delusion; and in the discharge of their social duties men and women ought to act as their deepest loyalties determine, for it is through those loyalties that they belong to humanity, and without their loyalties they could not even have true insight into human problems. Moreover, Germany's wrong is admittedly more ethical and ours more economic: and, despite much recent theorising to the contrary, the ethical is of prior importance to the economic, ethical issues are deeper issues. Nor, for that matter, is Germany's economic behaviour commendable as an improvement.

Nevertheless, if Germany's action is in any sense an effort—however misguided and ill-conceived—to solve a social problem in which we have failed, it would affect our attitude to the struggle. Not that we could therefore have evaded it; but neither could we engage in it with such good conscience or clear purpose, till we had first given ourselves proof of a resolution not to shirk the problem, but to solve it more rightly than the enemy, whose initiative in the matter we had good reason to reject.

But, it may be objected, we can come to no new agreement upon economic reform in present conditions: to attempt such a thing would be to arouse controversy which it is now prudent to postpone. Perhaps so, but the misgiving we are discussing is already present: I suggest that it could be recognised and its causes avowed in terms that need not arouse old controversies but might transcend them, giving us a new hope and vision of the future.

What is this world-economic system to which we are supposed to stand committed? Fundamentally, it is a rather new conception —for it is but two centuries old—of the means by which nations should earn their livelihood, and England has been its greatest advocate and example. It is condemned, on the one hand, as a method which deprives the working classes of their freedom and subsistence—that is the Communist challenge, which the Soviets uphold. On the other hand, it is denounced as a system which tends to divide whole nations into two classes —those which have world-credit and access to the resources of the globe, and those which lack such advantages—an injustice which is often alleged by the German and Italian dictators. There is truth in both these lines of criticism; but let us begin with a more detached view of the process which has actually been at work in recent years.

Two things, chiefly, have transformed our civilization into its present shape and brought about its crisis—the discovery of, and access to, the whole world; and the application of scientific method to man's economic activities. These were made possible by a great extension (also partly scientific in method) of the use of money. It was made customary for new money, in the form of credit, to be created for special purposes. The importance of this innovation is easily grasped if one reflects why the making of *unauthorised* money has always been held so grave a crime.

The objection to counterfeit coining is that the money so fabricated has power, in a money economy, to set other people—indeed the whole community—to work for the coiner, to just the extent that he plies his craft. A group of coiners who were able to produce, unopposed, a sufficient flow of money could bend the whole productive economy of a nation towards any end that they might determine. The power to issue and recall money is the ultimate seat of power in a money economy—the power, for example, which enables a government in the last resort to mobilise all the national energies for defence.

This power was vested in the financial institutions, under certain safeguards, for use in what was believed to be a good purpose. In co-operation with the rising class of the factory organisers and entrepreneurs, the money was made which gradually transformed the industry of modern nations and gave us the great age of progress. The mighty works of these last two centuries are the products of an exuberant enjoyment in the exercise of new technical powers, liberated by a highly licentious treatment of the community's credit. On the whole, it is fair to say that new credit was always made for the enterprising, provided that their enterprise was sure to get it back in prices from the public. The real needs, the social value and the cultural purpose of the new enterprises were not much inquired into; there was even a theory that they ought not to be: all would be for the best in the end. There was scarcely any thought of "planning" the use of the technical powers which were revolutionising our economic life.

Under these conditions we have had an orgy of more and more ingenious mass-production for profits, and for the sake of "progress" as an end in itself, irrespective of the ends to which it might be progressing. There is one obvious weakness in an economy so completely delivered over to the uncontrolled expansion of finance and technofacture—that it might soon be without enough to eat. But this nemesis has been postponed: the whole world was being opened up, and its soil was scandalously exploited to feed the consuming fires—how scandalously we are only now finding out by a rapid diminution of the fertility of the globe as a whole. Populations are increasingly disinclined to devote their lives to that conservation of resources and culture of living nature which is the real physical basis of society, for these vocations are not the ways to profit or prestige. Nor are we much helped by attempts to subject the arts of cultivation to mechanism and mass-pro-

duction, which almost always lead to more profligate waste of natural resources.

Startling results of this economic distortion were exhibited in the years between the wars. The cultivators, discouraged by the collapse of prices, their exploited land blowing away from under their feet, frequently gave up in despair and returned to the cities, which grew at a great rate, swarming with mobs of disinherited individuals as the failure of the primary producers overseas also created more unemployment at home. Crowds of needy people, for whom even superfluous work could not be found, were inimical to the social organisation in which they felt excluded, and they showed a tendency to destroy it by Communist, Fascist or more subtly subversive activities. Societies exposed to such disintegrating forces could not easily be induced to submit to discipline, except by the threat of mortal danger, but the threat was soon provided. It became possible to begin the re-employment of the people only by making armaments and preparing for war; which does not seem a sensible solution of the problem, but no government has yet discovered any other.

Now, we have so far failed to give assurance that England is not fighting a war to begin this disastrous process all over again. To frame the peace we hope to attain in such terms as a Federal Union, does nothing to touch this essential issue. It helps little even to propose that the great industrial nations should share the colonial lands and supplies of raw materials, for such a syndicate of nations would, under the old incentives, intensify exploitation and might hasten the world famine. It is not mere jealousy for "national sovereignty" that inspires distrust of these proposals, but something deeper. Most people, it is true, may not clearly understand what is wrong, but they feel it. The human race has come, largely by our guidance and example, to a crisis that can only be solved by promulgating anew the true order of values. So comprehensive a confusion of our social activities can hardly be set right by piecemeal political efforts to stimulate certain activities and discourage others, unless there is first a conversion of the social consciousness, sufficient to bring about a new realisation of the relation of the individual to society and of society to the living earth. To define these basic relations is one function of the spiritual order; the initiative is with religion.

This touches the purpose of the C.N.L. as I understand it—to help in sustaining the soul of the nation in its ordeal, whilst deepening its consciousness of the great predicament in which all have to play their parts. For, in the view I have tried briefly to present, it is clear that the war proceeds from a novel error of cultural principle, one that vitiates the entire growth of modern societies and involves equally our enemies, our allies and ourselves. The readiness of certain European nations to cast away all ethical restraints is to be understood partly as a natural desperation; which seeks even by catastrophe to arrest a disintegration that is felt, however imperfectly understood.

The outbreak of political passion and strife for power must now run its course; the issue can only be decided by the morale of the nations, by their armaments and physical endurance. Not so the deeper issue of restoring health to Western societies. That demands a change of thought which can only grow from enlightenment as to certain minimum demands of nature, as to the conditions upon which life is granted to man. But I am going to say this—that the morale of our people, even for the present phase of the struggle, depends upon the existence and growth of that enlightenment in our midst. It is not a task to postpone: but to be undertaken first by those who have most insight, and the higher their authority in the spiritual order the better.

Religion is being revealed again as a concrete, physical issue. The salvage of our culture depends visibly upon our reconciliation with the greater life in which we live and have our being. Many would now recall us to belief in God, but God will again fade into an abstraction or merely an Absolute Idea if we cannot recover a sacramental relation to the living Creation, as one aspect of the Creator Himself. Has modern Christianity sufficiently borne witness against the delusion of the age that

man has acquired powers entitling him to the conquest of Nature? Or has it perhaps played up to that popular error by emphasising the truth that God transcends Nature, but neglecting the no less vital truth that He is so immanent in every part of it as to be conscious of every sparrow?

This distorted conception of the values and the realities by which man lives prevails throughout our industrial civilisation. It is not peculiar to England, though one can easily see that in this country, living by industry to a greater extent than any other of its size, we have almost acquired a national vested interest in the error. To admit the dependent nature of man's physical life involves admissions repugnant to nearly all of our modern schools of thought: it would amount to an act of intellectual penitence, a great recantation.

But Nemesis has now arrived. We are discovering that so long as our best invention is directed to exploit and conquer Nature, our devices turn somehow against our own life; and that the earth itself can lose patience and revolt. Humiliation is coming to us in Western society, except to those who can humble themselves in time. Not many are needed to begin this work, and few perhaps could have faith and courage to perceive that the way to strengthen the soul of modern men is through the truth he most fears would weaken it. All worldly calculation is against the idea that we must fulfil the minimum demands of Providence. All common sense is for it, and if what I now write seems at the moment to have no basis in common sense it is because we have not, as a society, even begun to face the question.

It is with societies as with individuals. When a man's case appears most desperate and hopeless, it is often the truth he is most reluctant to admit that contains the saving grace.

Yours sincerely,

PHILIP MAIRET.

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